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News

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PIANO FOUR-HANDS CD RETRIEVES RECORDINGS OF ROMANTIC GEMS FROM VINYL VAULTS

*Pianists Elizabeth Buccheri and Richard Boldrey
Perform Works by Onslow, Reger, Wagner,
Liszt, Grieg, and Balakirev*

Top-Drawer Duettists on a Mid-Price Reissue

Pianists Elizabeth Buccheri and Richard Boldrey play Romantic-era duets on a new mid-priced CD of digitally remastered, analog recordings from the 1970s and 80s, previously issued on LP and long out of print.

The Buccheri/Boldrey Piano Duet performs gems by George Onslow, Max Reger, Richard Wagner, Franz Liszt, Edvard Grieg, and Mily Balakirev on *Romantic Music for Piano Four Hands*, (Cedille FOUNDATION CDR 7002, \$11.99 suggested retail price).

The CD comprises selections from two LPs released on the Spectrum label in 1979 and 1985, utilizing the original reel-to-reel master tapes.

A *Fanfare* review of the first LP noted that Buccheri and Boldrey “don’t just play the notes. They enjoy the music, and convey that enjoyment tangibly. . . . Every time you feel like some unalloyed enjoyment, you’ll consider pulling this disc down and playing it.”

The 12-page CD booklet includes an essay on the development of piano four-hands repertoire and program notes adapted from the original LP liner materials written by New York educator and chamber music programmer Janice Marciano.

The CD brings a small onslaught of Onslow (1784–1853), whose music opens and closes the program. The least-known composer on the disc, Onslow was an Englishman born in France and a contemporary of Schubert and Spohr. Stylistically, Onslow’s Sonata No. 1 in E Minor, Op. 7, for Piano Four-Hands straddles the late-classical and early Romantic periods. “Typical of Onslow’s style,” Marciano writes, this sonata “is a highly expressive work, unified and well developed with regard to harmonic and melodic structure.” Onslow’s Sonata No. 2 in F Minor, Op. 22, “likewise represents a high point of the piano duet repertory,” Marciano writes, calling it “perfectly conceived for the medium.”

Reger’s six *Burlesques*, Op. 58 — three of which are included on the new CD — are virtuoso pieces “whose brevity tends to make one overlook their remarkable construction,” Marciano writes. Reger (1873–1916) created miniatures “filled with interesting ideas imaginatively worked out.”

Wagner’s early — and decidedly un-Wagnerian — Polonaise in D Major, from 1831, shows a pre-operatic Wagner (1813–1883) writing with the lightness and charm of Carl Maria von Weber.

Liszt (1811–1886) composed the *Grand Valse di Bravura*, Op. 6, as an early solo concert piece. It is reminiscent of Chopin’s style and has a coda whose shifting rhythms build “dynamic intensity and momentum toward its close,” Marciano notes.

Grieg (1843–1907) “evokes magical landscapes” with his folk-inspired *Norwegian Dances*, Op. 35, originally written for piano four-hands but better known in the orchestral versions by Hans Sitt.” These delightful pieces exhibit Grieg’s characteristically “colorful pianistic touches and harmonic turns of extraordinary piquancy.”

Balakirev (1837–1910) wrote only one original work for piano duet. His three-movement Suite for Piano Four-Hands consists of a Polonaise, Chansonette, and Scherzo.

The Buccheri/Boldrey Duet was formed at North Park University in Chicago during the early 1970s, when both artists were faculty members. The pair appeared on “Live from WFMT” broadcasts and in Dame Myra Hess Memorial Concerts in downtown Chicago. The team went on to perform elsewhere in the Midwest and also in the American southeast.

Ms. Buccheri lists, among her many credits, having served as pianist for the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra and having performed and toured with the Buffalo Philharmonic. She was accompanist for the Chicago Symphony Chorus for 28 seasons and since 1987 has been assistant conductor at Lyric Opera of Chicago. She has recorded extensively on the Sony, CRI, Boston, Albany, and Cedille labels. Her music-preparation work for several of conductor Sir Georg Solti’s landmark opera recordings on the London label earned her a Solti Foundation Award. She joined the faculty of Northwestern University’s school of music in 2000 and supervises its collaborative piano program.

Mr. Boldrey’s extensive credits include having soloed with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in 1977 in three Bach concertos under the baton of Carlo Maria Giulini. He served as pianist and in other performing roles with the Robert Shaw Chorale. From 1977 to 1985, he was harpsichordist and organist with Chicago’s acclaimed Music of the Baroque. Well known not only as a pianist but also as a vocal coach, conductor, author, and educator, he has been a music professor at Northwestern University since 1995.

Digital remastering for the new CD was the work of Cedille engineer Bill Maylone, a two-time Grammy Award nominee.

To bring the old analog master tapes up to 21st-century audio quality standards, Maylone applied “broadband de-noising” to remove unwanted artifacts left by electronic components in the original recording chains. Also, the master tapes for the 1979 and 1985 LPs had noticeably different audio qualities, a contrast that could prove distracting to listeners when heard on a

single CD. So, Maylone applied small amounts of equalization and other signal processing for sonic consistency.

Audiophiles and recording professionals might be interested in how the master tapes used for the 1985 LP (Volume II) posed a difficult transfer problem for Maylone, due to their numerous mechanical splices. Over the decades, the adhesive on the splicing tape oozed out, causing the splices to stick to underlying layers of recording tape. The result was a jerky, start-and-stop motion that caused audible defects during playback.

Attempting to patch over the sonic defects with music from the old LP itself was ruled out, Maylone says, because of the vinyl disc's surface noise.

Maylone's ingenious solution was to run the master tapes through a pair of identical, professional reel-to-reel tape consoles, arranged side by side (a setup inspired by the two-deck tape delay systems used by radio stations to screen live on-air phone calls for inappropriate content).

The master tapes traveled from the supply reel of the first tape deck, over its playback heads, and through the capstan-and-pinch-roller transport. This deck was used only to get the spooled tape unstuck and flowing smoothly. Then, the tape was threaded directly through the second deck's tape transport, past the playback heads, and onto the take-up reel. This second deck played back the tape and fed a signal to the analog-to-digital converter.

"I was able to play the offending reels of tape without a single broken splice and without a single unwanted artifact in the audio," Maylone says. "We could now get the pieces we wanted from the second volume onto the CD."

Celebrating its 20th anniversary in 2009, Grammy award-winning Cedille Records (pronounced say-DEE) is dedicated to showcasing the most noteworthy classical artists in and from the Chicago area.

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Romantic Music for Piano Four Hands
(Cedille FOUNDation CDR 7002)

**Works by George Onslow,
Max Reger, Richard Wagner,
Franz Liszt, Edvard Grieg, and
Mily Balakirev**

**Elizabeth Buccheri and Richard Boldrey,
piano duettists**